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# Cynthia Miller Papers

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Known in the psychiatric survivors' movement as Kalisa, Cynthia Miller was a radical activist on behalf of the mentally ill. An ex-patient based in New York, she became a member of Project Release in the early 1970s, one of the first wave of organizations fighting for the civil rights of mental patients and combatting forced institutionalization, and was a contributor to Madness Network News and other publications. A poet, writer, and a committed feminist and out lesbian, she took part in civil disobedience to oppose electroconvulsive therapy, working with Judi Chamberlin, George Ebert, Leonard Roy Frank, and others.

Though varied and fragmentary, Cynthia Miller's collection is a rich resource for study of the early history of the psychiatric survivors movement and the work of one activist in resisting psychiatric oppression. The collection contains some of Kalisa's writings and correspondence along with ephemera and a varied collection of newspapers, newsletters, and other publications relating to Project Release and several other organizations that Kalisa supported, including the Mental Patients Liberation Front and the Alliance for the Liberation of Mental Patients.

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## Background on Cynthia 'Kalisa' Miller

A strong presence in the psychiatric survivors movement in New York city during the 1970s and 1980s, Cynthia Miller was an organizer, writer, and activist. A feminist and out lesbian, Kalisa (as she was generally known) had roots in the antiwar movement, but after being hospitalized following "emotional difficulties" ensuing from being raped, according to her physician, she experienced the stigmatization that often accompanied mental illness, making it "extremely difficult" for her to function "at full capacity."

In 1976, Kalisa became a member of Project Release. Dedicated to working nonviolently "to free present and former psychiatric patients from social injustice and oppression," as it announced in its statement of purpose, Project Release was part of the first wave of ex-patients' organizations formed to oppose forced institutionalization and psychiatric oppression. Kalisa joined Judi Chamberlin, George Ebert, Leonard Roy Frank, and Don Weitz, among others, in civil disobedience against electroconvulsive therapy at the American

Psychiatric Association in 1983 and the First International Conference on Electroconvulsive Therapy in 1985, and she contributed to a number of early newsletters in the movement.

## Scope of collection

Though varied and fragmentary, Cynthia Miller's collection is a rich resource for study of the early history of the psychiatric survivors movement and the work of one activist in resisting psychiatric oppression. The collection contains some of Kalisa's writings and correspondence along with ephemera and a varied collection of newspapers, newsletters, and other publications relating to Project Release and several other organizations that Kalisa supported, including the Mental Patients Liberation Front and the Alliance for the Liberation of Mental Patients.

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1978

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California feminism: a cultural shock, by Monika Jaeckel and Monika Savier, Madness Network News vol. 5:2  
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Center for Independent Livign  
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Coalition Against Psychiatric Abuse: Commitment Papers (We Are Committed)  
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Conreur, Yves-Luc: "A statement from the psychiatricized"  
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Consciousness-raising questions on "mental illness"  
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Correspondence: Conreur, Yves-Luc  
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Seem, Mark: Preface to three statements from the Third International Meeting of the Alternatives to  
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Standing on my knees, by John Olive [review]  
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Survivor from Bellevue... Daughter toward the fourth age... Lesbian/Madwoman  
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State and Mind, vol. 6:3  
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Box 6  
Tempkin, Tanya: "State dumps psychiatrists: former shrinks a threat to our communities"  
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Why we no longer have a section labelled "psychology"  
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Williams, Susan: "Women's psychology: mental illness as a social disease," Radical Women's Publications:  
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## **Administrative information**

### **Access**

The collection is open for research.

## Provenance

Gift of Tom Behrendt, June 2015.

## Processing Information

Processed by I. Eliot Wentworth, June 2015.

## Language:

English

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## Search terms

### Subjects

- Alliance for the Liberation of Mental Patients
- Chamberlin, Judi, 1944-2010
- Electroconvulsive therapy
- Feminism
- Mental Patients Liberation Front
- Mentally ill--Civil rights
- Project Release

### Contributors

- Miller, Cynthia [main entry]

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